

You Don't Have to Fight Alone by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: 5 + 1, Abusive Parents, Darker than the last one cause Jonathan., It all gets better, Jonathan POV, M/M, Promise., traumatic childhood

Language: English

Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lonnie Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-20

Updated: 2017-12-20

Packaged: 2022-04-03 14:54:20

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,761

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

His whole life, he was faced with monsters, demons and creatures he didn't and couldn't understand.

Their faces morphed, once inhumanely human features became something bestial and terrifyingly bloodthirsty. They charged at him from every angle, threatening his state of mind, tearing at his skin, sinking fangs into his very soul. He knew the world was filled with cruelties and he had always believed that he'd be the one to face such torture alone.

Little did he know that there was a longing ray of sunshine beside him, ready to fight for him.

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Author's Note:

Day Two: Monster Hunting!

Once again, I'm taking this rather loosely. There will be monsters and ghouly-ghouls, but I'm playing with some other tidbits.

1. They Walk the School Grounds

Jonathan cannot stand these fools. They act as if they were hunters, predators of some form. They stalk the hallways in search of the weakest teenagers before striking and reinstating their place within the food chain of school.

(*What bullshit*, he thinks. Something in the back of his head, however, doubts it and it laughs bitterly, cackling at how *weak* and how *fucking pathetic* he is.

It doesn't sound like himself.)

They strut and parade themselves through the school hallways, intentionally shouldering any individual who dared to shuffle a centimetre into their path. These creatures would hunt in the halls at lunch and in between lessons, waiting for an unfortunate soul to wander past before they engulf the person with unfathomable bounds of pain and self-hatred.

Jonathan knows the feeling well enough.

He remembers his first day at high school; bitterly so. He recalls his already terrified state of mind, freshly minced from the grinding experience of middle school. He still feels that burning jolt to his shoulder, the embarrassing stumble and the inevitable tumble.

He is still spiteful when he imagines the face of that demon sneering down at him.

Today is no different.

Jonathan's torment begins the moment he parks and exits his car. Blood hungry eyes follow him as he walks towards the main school building. These are mere carrion-eaters, waiting to pick his bones once the true beast has taken its bite. Some of these pickers recognise him for what he is – prey – others stall, ready to pounce on his remains as soon as something bigger had driven its talons deep into his chest, piercing his very heart.

(For a while, he had thought that this sensation, this feeling of being hunted, only started in high school. But, as the year progressed, as he is given more time to doubt his being, question his existence and dismiss his confidence, Jonathan realises that he had felt like prey for a fair bit of life young life.)

He begins the treacherous walk towards his locker, knowing that a brute consisting of Steve Harrington, Tommy and Carol was waiting just around the corner. And when their ugly faces appear, Jonathan wants to cry, wants to go home and just forget everything – he is so tired and so ready to just leave this all behind.

Usually, they would bring him pain, send him and his books sprawling into the hallway, land a fist or two into someplace hidden. Sometimes they jeer at him, much like a sadistic hell beast toying with their food. And for some reason that Jonathan cannot understand, he finds that the blood bleeds faster when they do this.

Today, they shove him at his locker, slamming it shut in his face. The resounding crash is so loud, Jonathan could feel the fair rushing to his features.

“Hey freak,” the three-headed serpent hisses.

He finds himself petrified, like every time before. His limbs are stiff, clutching tightly at the strap of his messenger bag. He is frozen, a deer in the headlights.

Physically, Jonathan appears to be waiting for the next bite to come. Mentally, he has isolated himself in a chamber, built himself a blockade against emotionally and physically stressing taunts.

There are horrible people in this world, and sometimes we are

unlucky enough to be cursed with their part in our lives.

He fights them from within, never letting their jibes ruin what made him Jonathan Byers.

1. No Home is Safe From Their Hunting

The dark figure storms out from a bedroom, crushing his form against the wall, cutting his oxygen, inciting that long-forgotten fear within his soul.

It is there, trapped between the wall and his bastard of a father that Jonathan remembers why his mum told him to never seek out this man. Echoes of pain and reminiscent arguments writhe their way from the back of his mind, filling his thoughts with nothing but this man's face, this man's fists, this man's spittle, this man, this man, this man.

Jonathan sees his baby brother curled up against his chest, tiny hands forced tightly against his ears, eyes screwed shut and whimpering. He hears the rustle of the blankets as his own arms wrap excruciatingly tight around the boy; he sees the angry red crescent moons dug into the flesh of his palm. He is the older brother, he tells himself, and it is his job to protect the boy in his arms.

It is *his* responsibility to shield Will from pain, block him from suffering, and give him a chance at a normal life. A life where no monsters trample on their already battle-worn souls.

The locked bedroom door is kicked open and the yelling becomes louder as the shrill pitch of his mother clashes with the malevolent roars of Lonnie. (Jonathan refuses to call him father, dad or any other variation of that. He was no father.)

His attention is brought back to Will in his arms, the innocent cause of such tumult in the household. Will is now crying, fearful sobs wracking his small frame, burrowing further into Jonathan's body.

Lonnie's enraged, screaming about how no son of his was this

despicable, this much of a ‘fucking fairy’.

He feels a burning grip in his hair, dragging his form away from his younger brother, tossing him towards the door. Will, sweet Will, has learnt over the years of his short life and scrambles to hide under the bed.

For a moment there is silence, thick with the sadistic hatred steaming from within Lonnie.

Then there is that blinding agony again, a numbing burn in his head. Then, nothing.

He would later hear the story from his distraught mum, hiccuping and crying all the way by his bedside in a hospital, explaining what Lonnie had done in his outburst. All the while, Jonathan has stared emptily at the white ceiling through slitted eyes, the light intensifying the ache at the back of his head, and his mum’s voice pushing needles to his ears.

Jonathan vaguely registers the masculine figure behind his mother (a bit too tall, a bit too built but he disregards it). He flinches before he lashes out, screaming for that monster to stay away from him.

(Lonnie had grabbed Jonathan by the hair and tossed him to the ground.

He had thrown him so hard, Jonathan landed unconscious.)

“This is my son!” the gravelly voice crows, dragging Jonathan from his memories. There is a thump against his chest and a tug at his shoulders, pulling him into the smoke and alcohol soaked form of Lonnie. He doesn’t move, doesn’t respond, and barely even looks at the new girl that Lonnie had decided to fuck.

We may be men, but deep inside we harbour our monstrous selves and unleash them onto those unfortunate enough to be below us. We have simply come to tame it, some better than the others.

Jonathan realises his defensive position, fists balled and ready to strike. He shoves Lonnie away. He could hold his own fights now.

1. That is Until They're Real

For the majority of his life, Jonathan had believed that monsters were all but human.

This thought was immediately vanquished when that *thing* appears on his living room wall. It is disgustingly ineffable – a pungent odour of death and decay, a squelch of slime and lord-knows-what, a grotesque and watery growl. Jonathan has never seen such a beast and, for the first time in his life, admitted to himself that there was no fucking way he was fighting that *creature* alone.

And for a while this thought holds true.

When he is with Nancy, rummaging through the shelves of the hunting store, he truly believes that someone is going to fight with him, to defend what he values in life. When they throw everything into the trunk of his car and he leads on the trunk lid while she smiles that wry smile at him, he actually thought for a moment that she'd be the one who understands.

By the time that they lay the bear trap, load a wooden bat with nails and test that damn yo-yo for the hundredth time, Jonathan was content. He wasn't alone in this fight, in this hunt.

And this hope is what makes it all the sadder.

When Steve Fucking Harrington, king of their pathetic small town school, waltzes into his home, face still bloodied and bruised from their brawl his belief falters. (Jonathan is secretly preening at the fight. *He held his own.*)

It flickers and dies out when Nancy acknowledges the older boy.

It is cut, never to be lit again when his own weapon, the bat artistically filled with nails, is thrown at Steve, who uses it with the power and agility of a true sportsman.

Unlike Jonathan.

He watches the flames crackle against the moist skin of the monster, *petal-head*, as Steve had lovingly named it. The three teenagers were huddled together, with Nancy braving the situation and standing closest to the howling creature, Jonathan a step behind and Steve hiding behind his shoulder.

(Jonathan, sweet and oblivious as he is, doesn't realise Steve's proximity and lacking concentration on the monster bonfire in front of them. He doesn't see Steve's adoring look, Steve's softening expression and his forlorn sigh all directed at *him*.)

Nancy rushes towards Steve and buries her thin frame against his. And Jonathan just knows. They're already lost in their own bubble, their own relationship and partnership in this hunt, this survival of life.

Sometimes, we find a soul whose monster shy beast blends in with our own and, in this case, we fall deeper and deeper into an odd and confronting bond. This remains for life, where some decide to cling to the bond, pulling themselves higher and higher till palms are rested warmly together. Others will watch it fade, the golden thread pulsing in and out of existence till... nothing.

Jonathan feels exhausted. No longer were his monsters internalised, human or a reflection of himself; they now existed in a literal form. And could very well kill him.

But even when he had this odd group to work with, he was still fighting alone.

1. They Creep into Your Heart and Soul

Months since the attack at his home, Jonathan has suddenly started living nightmare after nightmare as soon as he closes his eyes.

The horror would begin with Jonathan staring outside his bedroom window, transfixed with *something* lingering in amongst the bushes. He would always open said window and clamber out, regardless of

the outcome, regardless of his screams and pleas to stay indoors, to hide and to lock himself away. He would slowly make his way towards the edge of the forest, the thin line between his home and the wilderness beyond.

As he stood there, there would always be three things that he would realise. Never in the same order. Never the same three.

Tonight it started with the heated breath of *something* huffing down the back of his neck. His whole body would do as it always did, stiffen up and freeze. In that moment of hesitation, Jonathan then feels something warm and wet dripping onto his shirt, sliding and falling to the ground. His body shudders and squirms to move away from the *thing* behind him – to no avail.

The third and final thing has been escalating.

And this time, Jonathan is terrified. He feels *something* slither up his back, around his shoulders. But he is petrified and doesn't consider the possibility of peering over his shoulder. It wraps itself around him, something sharp and prickling crushing into his side. Jonathan doesn't even think he is breathing anymore, his lungs burning with the effort to stay still, to be calm, to escape.

Then it vanishes.

Jonathan is always left standing at the edge of the woods having being assessed by some creature. Like he was food, something to be toyed with before being horribly consumed.

The dream doesn't end there though and in his dream, he knows. Without thinking, he makes his way back to his slightly ajar bedroom window, pulls the whole thing open and just climbs back in. He doesn't change his shirt, he doesn't close the window, he just lies on top of his sheets. Waiting

And, like the millions of dreams before, two clawed tentacle slip into his room, followed by the black but furless claw of *something*. The smell of rotten meat grows stronger and stronger and Jonathan is paralysed where he lays.

Two otherworldly eyes of green blink open at his window sill. It creeps into his room, giant form unhindered by the small window. It seems to phase into his room

Unlike the other times, Jonathan hears someone calling his name, someone banging on a window, demanding he ‘unlock the damn thing, Jonny’. It sounds awfully familiar and Jonathan is somewhat reminded of monsters he had battled before. Some haunting creature that strangely befriended him.

But it is too late, Jonathan thinks. The hellhound is in his room, it is slipping closer and closer towards his prone form. It is just about to dig its fangs into his—

Like the many times before, Steve Fucking Harrington appears in his face. (He could swear his heart skips a beat but, no, bad heart. Bad feelings, down.)

He is grinning stupidly but there is an unmistakable flicker of concern in his eyes.

“You promised to teach me how to use that bank robbing camera of yours, Jonny boy.”

Sometimes, we crowd our fears and our worries deep within us. We fear their ugly forms and refuse to step foot towards them. In doing this, we somehow have nursed them, let them come to fruition so that when they manage to snap those long locked chains, they will tear us to pieces. Leaving nothing for hell to claim.

Jonathan pushes away his sweaty fringe, nodding tiredly. No one could battle the nightmares he harboured, no matter how many times they broke into his house and trampled on his home.

1. And Manifest in the Woods

For weeks since the build-up of his nightmares, Jonathan fears the forest, trembles at the thought of his room, and torments himself to stay awake. Exhaustion weighs heavily on his shoulders, threatening

to drop him unconscious any minute.

(But he has to stay awake. He cannot sleep, cannot rest, cannot close his eyes. It is waiting.)

It had come to a point where Steve, along with his annoying band of trouble making children, had consistently prodded and poked at him for answers.

They will normally leave him alone because “Jonathan ‘My Life is Defined by Sitting in a Corner and Brooding’ Byers is no fun and makes me sad”. But for some reason, they circle him cautiously, waiting to catch him when he fell, hoping to corner him when his mind inevitably slips.

It takes a combination of Dustin’s enduring ability to annoy and Steve’s sudden turn towards mother-henning for the beans to spill. He is trapped in his own bedroom with Dustin glaring him down and Steve guarding the door. Jonathan sighs and digs the palms of his hands into his eyes, groaning weakly.

“Nightmares. Not the Demogorgon, something else. I don’t know, I just can’t sleep.”

And that is all it takes.

All hell breaks loose because Dustin is screaming at Steve, yelling at him and telling him that “El says something is coming for Will’s brother. She was fucking right!” Steve is in a mode of panic, ignorant of everything flying out of the curly headed boy. He had taken the quick strides towards where Jonathan sat, fretting about Jonathan, running fingers through his hair.

(If he wasn’t so damn tired, he is sure that his pathetic little heart would beat faster, a coil of excitement and burning need hidden in his chest.)

Something rustles in the woods beyond Jonathan’s window and the three boys turn to stare out of it.

Nothing there.

The lights in his room flicker dangerously and the window slips open.

Nothing there.

The lights suddenly flare and explode.

The darkness of the evening settles in the room

Jonathan is terrified. For the first time in his life, in his tired and beaten time on Earth, he is fucking lost and scared. He knows this is something he encounters alone – he couldn't possibly ask someone to lay their lives on the line to help him.

We often forget since living is a bit of a war. We forget that we have allies and friends and lovers who will stand by your side, clutching their various range of weaponry, ready to run headfirst into whatever allay you have met. We think ourselves alone in this world, alone till death.

He still steels himself, shoving the other two individuals behind himself.

1. Fight No Battle Alone, Dear One

Something bubbles and pushes its way out of Jonathan's wall. The three kids stand stunned as some panther-like creature protrudes from the wall, two toothed vines breaching from above it. It growls and roars, a gruesome green eyeball makes its way through the wallpaper and stares.

At Jonathan.

"Displacer Beast," he hears Dustin whimper behind him.

It was the thing of his dreams, the traumatic breath and growl that tore at his sanity. Without thinking, Jonathan forces his way out of the room, latching onto both Dustin and Steve as they barrel out. He had to get them out - away from whatever this was. They were nothing more than collateral otherwise. From behind them, he can

hear something shredding and crashing in his room, a thundering roar shaking the foundations of the old house.

They trip down the narrow hallway and Jonathan shoves Dustin towards an open window, ordering him to get Hopper. Dustin hollers something about projection and illusions before he is scrambling off the leaf-strewn ground. The sound of claws digging through the carpet and crunching the floorboards of his room rumble from beyond his door.

For some reason, he knows that beast was not after the boy, nor was it after Steve.

Once they get to the front door, Jonathan attempts to push Steve out, lock him outside where it is safer – he just knew. He whispers a sorry, a promise and hides his affections. He tries to force the door close, knowing that *Steve would be safer; Steve would be happier*. A tight grip on his hand says otherwise and their rapid pants of adrenaline and fear sync. Steve tugs urgently while Jonathan jerks and writhe his way out of the older boy's grasp. A deep growl and shattering of wood startle Steve enough that Jonathan manages to break free and slam the door in his face.

There, in front of his rabbiting soul, stood a giant monster, something resembling a starved black panther with two protruding vines from its back. The vines whip and flick about the creature's bony form, all the while a piercing hiss fills the air.

Jonathan stares and for the first time in his life, he prays.

He feels the floorboards vibrate as the beast forces itself upwards and leaps towards Jonathan. He dodges. Barely. He lands on his side, huffing at the sudden shock of pain against his elbow and shoulders. He quickly tries to turn and to crawl away, only to feel something grossly frigid snapping around his forearms, dragging him back.

The creature takes a second to re-orient itself now that Jonathan was in his hold. It gets strangely closer by the second, baring a yellowed set of slime dripping fangs. It phases in and out of existence, creeping closer and closer to Jonathan's petrified form.

This was it.

A battle to lose.

The two vines slither their way further up Jonathan's arms, the millions of needle-sharp teeth catching his skin to draw blood. It is *toying* with him.

A battle to die in.

Haunting green eyes on a sunken and decaying face leans towards him, the stench of fear and hatred abusing Jonathan's nostrils.

Then the beast was knocked away, the vines ripped from around his arms to draw a pained cry from his lips. For a moment, they jerk him across the room, slamming his head into a corner. Claws dig into his calf and a shot of blinding heat races up his body, sending someone into action. Then the pressure disappears, the heavy weight of impending death lifted as the beast is sent crashing further into the living room. In place of the Hellcat was Steve with that damn nail-riddled bat in swinging position, standing protectively in front of Jonathan's prone form. The bat is ripping with tendrils of slime and black sludge.

From this point, he must admit, everything gets hazy.

He vaguely remembers Steve's cautious circling of the beast, the enraged emerald never leaving the older boy's form. (He doesn't hear his whispered litany of no's, begging Steve to leave this fight, this hunt.) It leaps and Steve falters before swinging his bat in a direction that had Jonathan whimpering in attempts to push the boy out of the way – the damn thing was going to claw his way and tear into Steve. (He doesn't realise the desperate cry that rips itself from his lips.)

He feels the burn of hot tears that build in the corners of his eyes as he forces himself up, stumbling and grasping at anything solid to find his balance.

Shots ring through the air.

Jonathan collapses. Unconscious. (He doesn't see Steve's panicked expression, shakily running to his bleeding form, dragging his foggy

head towards his lap, crying, begging, petting his head, yelling for Dustin, for Hopper, for help. He doesn't know that Steve refused to let him go, struggling to pull him into his arms as Hopper agitatedly yanked him into a vehicle. He doesn't get to hear the soft cries that Steve hides in his sleeves as they rush to medical assistance.) The illusion of the beast vanishes while a hefty thud falls at the opposite side of the room, terrifyingly close to Jonathan.

There are battles that cannot be fought by our own hands. We need the strength, the protection and the love of others. We need a legion of those once loved, those currently adored and those that will find a place in our hearts. We need to trust.

Jonathan feels the soft and warm press of lips against his cheek.

And he wakes up, once a-fucking-gain, to the exhausted but surprised face of Steve Harrington.

He doesn't think he could be happier.

Author's Note:

As per the trend of my work, this is unbetaed. Feel free to comment with criticism and so forth. I'll admit, I'm not too happy with this one.

Personally, I can understand Jonathan's mindset more, but it is harder to write because you either see him as a man with anger and pain built up inside or absolute calm and loneliness haunting his thoughts. Both of which are hard -- I end up writing a very two-dimensional being with nothing more than the repeats of 'sad, gloomy, broody'. I had tried to tie in some snark etc. but for some reason, I ended up with another character which didn't truly reflect Jonathan.

I don't know.. Let me know what you think either way.

Have a great one!